

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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"Blindsided"

II Samuel 11

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Long before there was Romeo and Juliet, before George and Martha, before Bonnie and Clyde, Bogie and Beall... Before Fred and Wilma... Long before Brad and Jennifer... There was David and Bathsheba.

And though it's familiar to all...

And we've heard it plenty...

It's important to tell again.

David's in the prime of his life. The narrator of Samuel has told us of his rise to power. Everything's perfect. Everyone loves him... approval ratings are through the roof. Half of Jerusalem has bumper stickers on their carts that say, "My King is a Jewish Shepherd." Or... "I voted for D." All the kids have posters on the wall of David holding Goliath's head.

The Kingdom is united.

Jerusalem's got a great infrastructure going...

economy is strong.

David found the Ark of the Covenant and brought it home.

Everyone in the Middle East respects Israel now. And what's more, David even has a new covenant with God where God has guaranteed his love forever. Everything is perfect... it's Camelot.

But... everyone knows what's coming... saga will become soap opera.

"In the spring," the story says, **"When kings go off to war, David stayed in Jerusalem."**

He tells himself that he's too old to be heroic and that his younger generals are more suited to the task. So rather than fighting the spring war, he **"spends long afternoons napping on his couch after his two-martini lunch (Willimon, Pulpit Resource)."**

He's taking a walk on his flat rooftop, looking down on the city, the city he built. And that's when he sees beautiful Bathsheba bathing. And as a friend of mine once pointed out, seeing her wasn't a sin. **"It was just one of life's little extras"** (Ken Massey).

Seeing wasn't the problem. It never is. It's the second glance that causes the problem...

The inquiring glance.

And the inquiring mind.

The thoughts unchecked at the door of the heart.

David investigates. He sends one of his boys to find out who she is and we hear that Bathsheba is only identified by the men to whom she belongs.

She is Eliam's daughter.

She is Uriah's wife.

And she is soon to be David's lover...

Because David doesn't see her as a person but as an object that he can take.

And he does. The narrator moves the story on quickly... It's direct, decisive action... The verbs in the narrative fly by.

He sent, he took, he lay,

she returned,

and the hammer falls...
she conceived.

Picture David's face as he opens the note marked "**personal, for the king's eyes only**". Feel David's heart pound as he rips it open and the acids in his stomach begins to churn as he reads the few words scribbled there. "**Dear David, Harah 'anoki.**" Which in the Hebrew means, "**I'm in real trouble.**"

David doesn't register any guilt, there's no time for that. The narrative flows rapidly, "**I'm pregnant. So David sent... for Uriah.**"

Just like that!

He doesn't skip a remorseful beat but moves quickly into a cover-up. There's no hand-wringing or bargaining with God. He acts. He's got to get Uriah home from battle and into bed with Bathsheba.

When Uriah reports to the king, David asks for a report on how things are going at the front lines... got to do that military "debriefing thing," don't you know?

"How's General Joab (aka G.I Joab)?"

"How's the morale with the troops, heard it's a little low?"

"And how is the battle plan working out?"

And then after all the official talk, they relax and David puts his arm around Uriah and says, "**Go wash your feet, my friend.**" This is a not-so-subtle suggestion that he go make love to his wife.

"Go wash your feet... big boy."

It's guy talk... elbow-to-the-rib talk... locker room talk.

"Go wash your feet, if you know what I mean."

And he sends him a gift, probably a basket full of cheeses and fruits and wine... and maybe even some oysters on the half-shell.

But Uriah doesn't cooperate. He sleeps on the palace steps and when David asked him about it he says, "**The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents... Joab and all your soldiers are sleeping out in the open field...**" *"I just couldn't, in good conscience, go have wine and cheese and sex and a good night's sleep with my wife."*

Well, that didn't work, so the next night David got Uriah drunk, figuring that with his defenses down, he'd find his way back to Bathsheba. But even inebriated, Uriah is honorable. It's very interesting seeing David's character, side by side with Uriah's. David is king of God's chosen people. Uriah is a Hittite, a foreigner.

He's an outsider and he's fighting a war for David... risking his life for the king. And the king not only commits adultery with his wife and tries to cover it up, but when the cover up fails he takes more drastic measures.

Again, the narrative shows no sleepless nights, no wrestling with the conscience. David just writes a letter to General Joab, telling him to put Uriah in the heat of the battle and abandon him there so he'll for certain be killed.

Uriah, honorable Uriah, unknowingly carries his own death warrant back to Joab. And Joab who is...

loyal to David like John Erlichman

or Charles Colson to President Nixon...

does what he is told

Uriah is sent to the front and Uriah is killed.

Joab sends word back to David, and he seems to know what's up. So he words the message just

so. Press releases have to be worded very carefully, don't they? Joab needs to cover his backside while doing David's dirty work.

Joab had put the troops right underneath the city wall of the enemy where they were vulnerable. So he says to the messenger, **"When David hears about my tactics, he's liable to explode... 'Didn't Joab know they'd shoot arrows from the wall. And didn't I hear that some woman dropped a big rock on Abimelech's head and killed him? What in the world was Joab thinking?'"**

Joab says to the messenger, if that happens, if King David goes ballistic, just say, **"Oh... your servant, Uriah the Hittite is dead."**

The messenger delivers the message, though not after massaging it. Deceit always grows in these situations, doesn't it? Lies spread like a bad cancer.

David hears the message and sends one back. **"Don't feel guilty, Joab, these things happen in war time."** And actually David's words are much more sickening and much more sinful. **"Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes."** David presumes he can rewrite the rules, override Joab's conscience.

The news makes it to Bathsheba and the author will not let us forget who she is. She isn't called Bathsheba even then. It's like salt in the wound. **"When Uriah's wife heard... she mourned."** She will even be known as "Uriah's wife" in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus... even there in the introduction to the Good News.

For appearances sake, David let her grieve long enough and then he married her and the child was born and David thinks it's all covered up... as if people can't count to nine... **"There, that will take care of that."**

But... But" the story jolts to a close, **"The thing was evil in the eyes of Yahweh."** We're reminded in the last line of the story that there are no cover-ups with God. And we're going to be reminded next week that there's a moral coherence in the world that not even the King can undo.

But for now, we're all just left horrified at what King David, the chosen, anointed one, has done. King David, a man after God's own heart is guilty of rape and several counts of murder. David who danced before the Lord and had God's guaranteed grace, messes everything up.

We're just left with mouths gaping and hearts falling. **"How could someone so good do something so bad? How could someone so right be so wrong?"**

It's an important question to ask because it's not just a story about a king and a Camelot but about any one in any life. **"How could that happen? Why does it happen?"**

Well, in this case there's some basic and not so basic stuff missing.

At the real basic level, it's clear David just isn't where he's suppose to be. He's supposed to be off at war. It's Spring, for crying out loud, and he's a king and kings go to war. But David didn't. David wasn't taking care of the basics.

This is the first level of spiritual work. It's sort of front-line spirituality... just doing what's supposed to be done. And usually... for most of us... none of that is glamorous.

It's getting up brushing the teeth, making the bed, and going to work kind of stuff.

It's doing a job well because it's a job and a job ought to be done well.

It's tending to the small stuff... the rituals of life. In the Spring, kings go off to war. And in the Spring, we pay our taxes... and in the morning, we make our kid's lunches and we take out the trash.

We mind our manners.

We say "please and thank you."

We kiss our spouse when we get home.

It's not glamorous or glorious. It's routine... following the rules... the kind of stuff that drives mid-lifers, like David, bonkers sometimes. But stuff that is really important. Doing all that you do with

care. It's just basic... Life 101.

It won't insure that a Bathshebagate won't occur in your life... but it's essential to a healthy life and healthy spirituality.

It's not enough, though. Working hard... being intentional... doing your part and following the rules is good stuff, but it isn't enough. If hard work and morality were all we needed, there wouldn't be a cross at the end of the gospel stories... and Jesus wouldn't all the time be saying, **"You've heard it said, but I say to you."**

The right externals are never enough...

Christianity isn't a new and improved legalism...

"Blessed are those who try harder... 'cuz they won't make a moral mess." That's not the Gospel.

And we know that... and that's part of what this story is doing here. David knew right from wrong... He'd done a million things right in his life. But still, he's about to be subpoenaed by the ultimate grand jury.

The problem was bigger than being at the wrong place at the wrong time. It was deeper. David was asleep. He wasn't awake. There was no inner witnessing presence that enabled him to see what was taking place. No instinct or faculty to help him remove himself from this situation.

And I'm not just talking here about some Jiminy Cricket conscience. David's not a sociopath. I'm not talking about the absence of a traffic cop in his head.

Nor am I talking about mere insight into himself... though that would have been really helpful and seems to have been lacking in this moment.

I'm talking about something all the saints call... attention... watchfulness. And they all say the same thing essentially... that in our immaturity as spiritual beings, we totally identify with our thinking mind. And the thinking mind is sort of a loose cannon.

It goes here and there...

And heads down this road and that...

Causes feelings of all kind...

And we are rarely in control of it... and worse, not even aware of the fact that it's controlling us.

We see someone get something we wanted at work and off we go, **"I can't believe that, I've work so hard and she just got here... And look at her, she doesn't even have a BlackBerry yet. And look at that revealing blouse... must not be a Christian."**

That's identification with the mind.

Your spouse makes a comment about something you're wearing and off you go... "she always, he never..."

Someone cuts you off in traffic you and off you go **in anger.**

The lines too slow at HEB and off you go **in impatience.**

You encounter someone different and off you go **in judgment**

Some challenge enters your life and off you go **in worry.**

You see the Jones' new car and off you go **in greed.**

You see Uriah's wife and off you go.

The mind... the thinking, feeling mind tends to rule us and run us. It's just that way... it's limited... And once we totally identify with it, we're lost... we're blind... we're in trouble.

"He saw, he sent, he slept," in more ways than one.

He was unconscious. He was asleep at the wheel of his inner life. He wasn't using attention and we don't either. We're just on autopilot most of the time.

Someone's critical of us and we get mad and seem to have no other options. Someone hurts our feelings and we withdraw and seem not to have any power to do otherwise. Someone misbehaves and we react into self-righteous condemnation. Someone compliments us and our chest swells and we don't feel it swelling.

And Bathsheba walks out in her backyard and we look... we long... and before we know it, it's too late.

How could this have happened? It happens to all of us everyday. We may not have an affair with Bathsheba, but we are mechanically controlled by all that's taking place around us and our reactions to it... circumstances... events... feelings... thoughts. We're controlled and we can't change it and we can't change it because we haven't seen it.

Or as the mystics put it, **“You can't remove the plank you're standing on.”**

Evagrius said that we have to “guard the heart.” Check the thoughts that come to us... and early in our journey, assume most of them are problematic. So we check them. **“How 'bout that... what about this?... Who goes there?... Friend or foe?”**

“Follow your heart, your emotions,” is terrible advice unless you happen to have been born a saint. **“Trust yourself,”** is more often than not, stupidity unless you're spiritually mature. What tends to drive us is fear, desire, power, neediness, and self-centeredness. And it happens unobserved.

We have to develop an inner witness... or better said... we have to discover within us, this inner witness... this presence. An observing eye.

There is, literally, a part of us that is made to do this... to be conscious and awake to what is taking place and yet enable us to be present to what is taking place. Some call it “organ of awareness” or an “organ on the borders.” It connects the spiritual realm to the material. It aligns the horizontal with the vertical.

It's in us but it's asleep. That's why Jesus was always saying, **“Wake up.”** It's why the church fathers loved the line from Song of Song's, **“I sleep but my heart (the inner being) is awake.”** **Why they said, “the mind must descend into the heart.”**

That's what we're after... and guess what... it takes work. If we're going to move beyond our “ordinary awareness,” we're going to have to work at it. If we're like the saints who've come before us (and we are), we're going to have to learn how to meditate and pray contemplatively... to become still. Just sitting in the pew and serving on a committee or two along the way, probably won't get it.

There is training to be done...

Inner work... And practice.

And it's hard but the good news is, you aren't alone in this. Not only do we have the witness of the saints and a community of friends and fellow pilgrims... but we have the inner reality of the Spirit who is working in us. Grace is there way ahead of our effort.

Listen again to Paul's prayer.

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts.” That's not just poetic writing; it's spiritual, metaphysical, ontological truth. There is an inner work that God wants to do. And God does it through the Spirit living and flowing in us.

Well, we need to return here next week... the story isn't over... but for today see David on the roof... unconscious... about to be blindsided... and ask yourself, **“Am I awake? Am I conscious?”** And if the answer is no... then it's time to do something about that.

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